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Bierma, Lloyd

Sarah Bartz
Northwestern College - Orange City

Narrator's name: Lloyd Bierma
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Interviewer's name: Sarah Bartz
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SB: So, Lloyd, can we start with kind of telling me about where you grew up and what growing up was like for you.

LB: I was raised on a farm about a mile and a half from Sioux Center, and I was the oldest of eight children. And my parents were farmers. I lived there until I was 19 years old. I graduated from high school from Western Christian in Hull when I was just 17 by a week, and then I worked on a farm for a farmer for two years, and then I moved to Los Angeles when I was 19. I didn't really know anybody, didn't have a job, just moved out there and decided that I was going to do something different. My father had told me when I was 13, 14 years old – and I started working out already when I was 13 years old – that if I ever wanted to farm, I would have to figure out how to do it because there were too many kids in the family to afford a farm for me. So I had that understanding, and I never regretted that – that was just a fact of life, and that was certainly acceptable to me.

But anyway, I moved to Los Angeles and then I worked in a machine shop for about a year and a half. First I drove a truck for a while, delivering parts, and then I cut shrapnel for bombs and various other defense projects. And then I went into construction work and I worked on construction for a while – masonry construction – and then I was a member of the union. I worked in Compton, which was a tough area of LA. I was in Watts and various other areas. A machine shop that I worked at was in Compton, so I did have a good exposure to the other side of farm life from the Midwest. And then I didn't work for a while – I bummed – and then I hung awnings on trailers and did some miscellaneous jobs, and then I was drafted into the service.

SB: Ok, and what year was that?

LB: 1964.

SB: [Typing noise] So then basic training – where did you go for that?

LB: Well, actually, I did my initial physical and so in Los Angeles when I was living there, and then when I received my draft notice, I could either transfer up there or otherwise come back here and probably start six or eight weeks earlier. And I figured as long as I was going to be drafted, I may as well get it out of the way, so I came back here and I was drafted and went to Fort Polk, Louisiana.

SB: So how did you feel about being drafted?

LB: I knew it was coming, and it didn't really bother me. I mean, it was fine. I had the attitude that, you know, it's a patriotic duty, and we should do that kind of work if we're called to do it.

SB: So what was basic training like for you?

LB: Well, Fort Polk, Louisiana, if you've ever been down South, it's hot, muggy. And it was interesting because initially, I was scheduled to go to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, but they had overflow problems there, so I was sent with probably 4 or 5 other guys from this area. And I ended up in Fort Polk, and I was the only one from the Midwest in the platoon that I was in – all the rest of the guys were from Oklahoma, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas – Deep South. And obviously I found that the Civil War wasn't over with yet and that was still a main issue.[1] I was in the 1st platoon – the other three platoons were spillover from Fort Dix, New Jersey, which included people from the East Coast, and I found out very quickly that there was a lot of tension yet between the Yankees and the Rebels. And it came out in different ways while we were going through our basic training.

Fort Polk was reactivated in North Fork when I started, and when I say reactivated, originally it was set up for World War II training and then it was, in essence, put in mothballs until they started doing the build-up at that time that I went in, and then they had to clean up a lot of the old buildings and barracks. And that along with adapting to the environment there. There were some things that were interesting – some people really thought it was a tough life – I didn't think it was that bad. They did what the Army always does, they change their mind. First of all, they said we had to get up at 4:00 in the morning to beat the heat of the day – we'd take an hour and a half off at noon. Well, they forgot about the hour and a half at noon and kept us going at 4:00 in the morning. That was the beginning of a day. Initially when I was there, I ended up in a leadership training group that had a two week special training before we started basic training. I always wondered how I ended up in there because I was not a good student in school or whatever, but then was told that I had one of the highest grades in their tests that they did. And at that stage, I was far-removed from school academics or any of those areas. So I went through that leadership and then I went through basic.

SB: So, you mentioned the Yankee-Rebel tension. Did any events stick out to you in particular, if you remember?

LB: Oh, a lot of incidental little things. Number one, there was a lot of racist talk. Number two, when the other three platoons were in charge of feeding us at noon or something like that, I can remember when we were on our march, I mean, they basically tried to starve us and give us very little food. There were little things like

[1] Although the American Civil War had occurred 100 years ago, many people in the South still felt (and feel today) the pain it caused. At this time, segregation and racism were still very much a part of the southern experience (Theroux).

that going on. But I happened to be the platoon guide, and I ended up carrying, for a while, the guidon,[2] the flag. And so I always thought that it was good to train in, for treating us that way by stepping up the pace and marching fast so when we went on a 14-mile march with packs, and it was hot and muggy. I stepped it off and was chewed out about four or five times by the sergeants, "Hey, slow it down, you'd walk me into the ground." And I didn't say it to him, but I said, it'll never happen [laughs] because I'm more stubborn than you are! But there was a lot of little comments, you know. And I say this too because I wasn't clean and pure or anything like that as far as race relations are concerned because, you know, I don't think I had a negative black attitude – I like people, I don't care whether they're black, white, yellow, brown, pink. I remember one time sitting on the steps of the barracks and one of the guys from Mississippi said – one of our guys in our unit was black from Arkansas – and he says, you know, he's really a good guy, it's just too bad he's a nigger. And I'm saying what, what? What kind of comment is that? Well, the deep-seated racial prejudice was obviously present. And there were some of those things that stood out.

On the other hand, the southern boys, I'd go anywhere with them. I mean, they were loyal, they were very hardworking. I would trust them; they wouldn't let you down for anything. They knew what end of a gun a bullet came out of, whereas some of the people from New Jersey had never seen a gun, never fired a gun, had never been outside. In fact, one of the guys I knew quite well from New York, Brooklyn, had never driven a car until he was 17 years old, and his parents never had a car, so when he got in the Army, driving a jeep was something he wanted to learn. And so you had a lot of different experiences. You get people that are used to being outdoors and going on their own, they do well.

So, it was a good experience. I wasn't negative about it at all.

SB: Did you have additional training, then, for being in the –

LB: Yes, I went from Fort Polk, Louisiana, to Fort Lewis, Washington, and initially, I was in advanced training for 90 days. And then I went on the job training for another 90 days. And when I say advanced training, I mean basically we spent a lot of time doing the usual military thing – marching, running, and then sitting in class for a while, and then doing inspections, and all that sort of thing. On my on the job training, I spent I think it was 60 days with the doctor, working side by side with the doctor, and then I think 30 days in a hospital just for experience. And then from there, I was assigned to another unit, a permanent unit, 4th division STRAC[3] unit. And I can't even remember what STRAC meant, it was something about strategically turning to go anywhere in the world on a 24-hour notice, which we trained and planned for a number of different times. We'd get an alert, and we'd have to load up everything, we'd have to get on planes and fly around in a circle and come back and land to make sure that we were ready to go.

[2] A flag carried by a military unit as a unit marker.

[3] US military acronym for Strategic Army Corps, a command with the capability to deploy worldwide on short notice ("Strategic Army Corps").

In the winter, we did go up to Anchorage, Alaska - actually to Fairbanks - and we did winter war games. And so for 30 days, we were out in the tundra and it was 40 to 60 below zero. We moved everyday literally, you know, and playing war games, and we had Special Forces harassing us. They'd shut off the gas, or they'd try to make life difficult for you out there, they'd steal your vehicles. And part of the theory, I think, at that time, was we got to be prepared in case the Russians decide to come down through Alaska[4] and get at us. And so we played some of those silly games. And it was an experience…learned to survive in extremely cold weather. They had a buddy system set up, and we did a lot of training before we went out there, but the idea was, if you get cut off or you get separated from your unit, you have to have two guys together to make sure you covered each other, make sure if you got frostbite showing up in your – whether it's your eyeballs or eyelashes or face or cheeks or anything like that, you have to check each other. Because when it's bitterly cold like that, you have to really be careful. And there were a lot of problems with vehicles not starting, or, you know, you could do foolish things. When I say foolish things – you could get into a vehicle, get it started, and if you tried to run it real hard, you could blow the whole transfer case apart because the oil would be thick even though it was arctic oil that was in a lot of these vehicles. So that was part of the whole training process.

SB: So, being a medic, was that something you had expressed interest in? Or did they just kind of place you in that position?

LB: They just placed me in that position. I don't know why or whatever, it's part of the military selection process, I guess.

SB: So, working side by side with a doctor, did anything medical-wise bother you?

LB: No, I don't think there was anything that bothered me that much. I gave an awful lot of shots, vaccines and so forth, for all kinds of things. Some of it, obviously, proactive, some of it was in response to different problems that occurred. I did minor surgery, if somebody had a growth or something like that, for example, on their back. I mean, the doctor would supervise me so I'd have to do the initial shot to localize the area and then do the cutting, removal, and then place it in for a test, or things like that. Or there might be other issues like that – broken arms, figuring out how do you bandage it. In essence, get away to better medical facilities. And it's interesting because my training focused quite extensively, especially after I got out of my advanced and on the job training, on medical procedures, processes, and expectations of a World War II/Korean War type of mindset. The actual experience of Vietnam was totally different because of the fact that it became primarily a – what we do around here quite often is – give them first aid, pack them up, and ship them out. And that's a lot different than where you're planted and can't move, and you have field hospitals and tents and stuff like that. Now, we did a lot of training

[4] During the Cold War, the US feared a Soviet attack through Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Iceland. The number of active duty military in Alaska peaked at 50,000 in the mid-1950s, but a military presence remained throughout the Cold War ("Cold War in Alaska").

with field hospitals and that kind of training. And to a certain extent, that's always valuable, but if you have significant injuries, then you ship them out.

SB: So then when were you sent over to Vietnam?

LB: I think it was around July? Of 2005. And what happened is…

SB: 1965?

LB: Yes, 1965. I went on a 30-day leave and ended up going to Los Angeles – I didn't have any money so I worked for one of the guys in construction for a week. And then I ended up coming here for a week. When I say here, I'm talking about northwest Iowa to visit my folks. And then I went to Washington because a good friend of mine was getting married and he wanted me to stand up for him, so I went there and then ended up getting back in the barracks on Sunday night, and they had apparently tried to chase me down, and I'd been moving [laughs] too fast. But I had orders to leave for Vietnam. So they told me, I said when? He said tomorrow morning.

Well, what happened is actually, that wasn't quite right. I was taken from my unit Monday morning and shipped to a new unit that they were putting together to go over to Vietnam, and that was in a totally different group, and a lot of different guys – I didn't know any of them, quite frankly, when I went over there. And I was assigned to that group, and then this group, in turn, was assigned to another group.

And I ended up leaving for Vietnam, I think, August…And I left on a ship, and it was kind of interesting because we were going to fly from the Air Force base in Seattle, well actually Seattle-Tacoma, McChord Air Force Base, I believe it was, to San Francisco and catch a boat in San Francisco. And we were all scheduled to leave, we were on the plane, and we got to the end of the runway, and one of the engines quit. And so we went back and they fiddled around with that for a while, put us back on there, and another engine went blank, so I figured somebody was trying to tell us something!

So we stayed there overnight, and then we ended up flying to San Francisco the next day and got on a boat. And I think there were 4400 guys on the boat, and we're all scheduled to be shipped for Vietnam. And we did – we left San Francisco in an evening – we were the last ones on – and we went outside under the Golden Gate Bridge and everybody was in a good mood and happy and so forth. I think we went through there probably 6, 7:00 at night. And then we got out in the sea, and we ran into some rough weather, and it resulted in 4000 of the 4400 guys getting sick and barfing all over the place. It was an unbelievable mess. And that lasted for 2 ½, 3 days, and it made me angry at that time because we were treated worse than cattle, I thought. I never wrote a letter to a congressman or anything, but I sure thought we should have because we were really, really…we were packed in there like sardines. I think the bunks were four bunks high, there was only about three feet between, and some of the old World War II vets can tell you about that too, but this was a troop ship they took out of mothballs to use for shipping people over.

It took us 17 days to get to Okinawa[5], and when we were off the coast of Japan, we ran into more rough weather, and so that started a few people getting sick over again. But we stopped at White Beach in Okinawa, which is a 7th fleet recreation area, and we were supposed to come in at – I think we were there about 12:00 at noon, and they let us off the boat around 1:00, and they had free beer and hamburgers, and we were supposed to be back on the boat at 6:00 that night. The upshot of the whole thing was, to make a long story short, there was a lot of drinking, etc., but we didn't leave there until 3:00 the next day, I think, something like that. There ended up being a riot, fighting and the whole thing, and we had 1500 guys that were on sick call that were either hurt or bruised or beat up or whatever. We ended up with I think four guys dying, and I forget how many in intensive care. They started the boat on fire – I mean, it was…if people ever talk about anarchy, this was a first-class example of it. It was unbelievable – friends hitting friends, people hitting people. I mean, it was just like animals. We always had this communist boogeyman that people were talking about, and I thought, you could drop us off in China and we'd all go off. Everybody was sick of the boat, sick of the sickness, and all that stuff. And then we went from there to Hội An[6], halfway down the coast. We were there for about maybe a week and a half, and then, because there were so many boats coming into the harbor at that time – in fact, there was a Korean regiment that was there, and there were a couple other ones, and so it took us a while to get unloaded, but I think we left around 2200 guys there. And then we went from there to Cam Ranh Bay[7] and unloaded another 1200, and then we went down to Vũng Tàu[8] - there were about 800 of us left, I think. And Vũng Tàu was at the mouth of the Saigon River, or what was called the Saigon River. And we went onto World War II landing craft and then ran them up on the beach, dropped the front end down, and then we had to go 3 miles inland and get on C-130 aircraft[9] – it was actually an old Japanese airstrip. And then we got on C-130s hotter than hot, blistering hot, and we flew northwest to Saigon,[10] to an area near Bien Hoa,[11] and that was our repple depple[12] rendezvous point because that's where we were supposed to connect with our equipment and so forth, which was coming on another boat. And I think we were there two or three weeks – considered a very secure area – and then we went from there to Phú Lợi,[13] which was northwest of

[5] Okinawa is an island in Japan where the United States military maintains a number of bases; it served as a central location for deploying America's military efforts in Vietnam (Okinawa).
[6] A coastal city located in Vietnam's Quảng Nam Province ("Hội An").
[7] Located at an inlet of the South China Sea on the southeastern coast of Vietnam, Cam Ranh Bay was a major port of entry for US military personnel and supplies during the Vietnam War ("Cam Ranh Bay").
[8] Various US military units as well as the 1st Australian Logistics Support Group were headquartered in Vũng Tàu during the Vietnam War, and it was also a popular R&R site ("Vũng Tàu").
[9] Large, propeller-driven Air Force planes that carry people and cargo (Dennison).
[10] Vietnam's largest city, known as Ho Chi Minh City since 1975 (Kislenko).
[11] Situated about 20 miles north of Saigon, Bien Hoa served as a key U.S. air base during the Vietnam War (Bass).
[12] US military slang for a replacement depot where soldiers arriving in Vietnam were assigned to units and soldiers leaving Vietnam were processed for homecoming, sometimes spelled "repo depot" or "repo depo" ("Repple-Depple").
[13] Phú Lợi was home to a former US Army base north of Saigon in South Vietnam (Stanton).

Saigon, up by the Cambodian border near the old Iron Triangle[14] area. And the Marine Corps had gone through the area, and then we followed up and settled in to a Japanese airstrip there. And that was our base camp, and we worked out from there. And basically when we came in there it was an airstrip, and that was about it, and then we had some of the Marines and some of the Army people build up Concertina wires and perimeters and bumpers and things like that. And so that's where we worked out of, or went from there.

SB: So, the unit you were a part of, did you guys have a mission? What was your role throughout your time?

LB: Keep those commies from getting us! No, not really. There were a number of issues that were involved with that stage. I think, as far as our mission was concerned, one of the things they always say is stabilize the area. But the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were coming down through Cambodia and then into the area we were at, and we were supposed to basically have our antennas up all the time, watching for them, you know. And they had a lot of search and destroy operations, and I was not with an infantry unit so I didn't do that, but I did back up on medical stuff. In other words, if they took them in from there, they might take them to our area, and then from our area, they would ship them to Saigon to 3rd Field Hospital. As far as my involvement with a lot of that was providing general medical aid and so forth as necessary. What we did also is, I would go out with a doctor and with a Vietnamese interpreter and with a guard, and we initially were doing it two or three times a week, we'd go to a village and we always said we treated the friendly VC[15]. And when I say friendly VC, the way the thing was set up is, at night, the Viet Cong controlled the countryside. During the daytime, the US did. And if the Viet Cong got shot at night, we went out there and patched them up during the day even though you couldn't tell who was who or what was what. And we did that for probably a month, a month and a half, six weeks. And then a doctor was killed, his interpreter was killed, his helper was killed by the Viet Cong, and then another one was killed, and then they decided that maybe it wasn't the safest thing for us to do. So we quit doing that. So I spent the rest of the time doing the usual things, I mean, routine medical problems, anywhere from venereal disease issues to illnesses, vaccines, things like that. And I traveled once in a while; I'd go to Saigon once in a while or go in convoys, because they usually had a couple medics with convoys if we were going to run, for example, to Saigon, or to some other place. I'm trying to remember if we were 30, 35 miles from Saigon, maybe further[16]. And then sometimes going west, there you'd go on the highways...so that was my world.

SB: Did you feel like your training helped, or was it adequate, do you think?

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[14] The Iron Triangle was an area about 25 miles north of Saigon that was a stronghold of Viet Minh activity during the Vietnam War ("Iron Triangle").

[15] The Vietcong forces in South Vietnam allied with the North Vietnamese and were also known as the National Liberation Front or the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam. The military phonetic for VC is Victor Charlie, and Charlie became a nickname for the Vietcong troops (Coffey).

[16] The distance from Saigon to Phú Lợi is about 18 miles (around 30 km) according to Google Maps.

LB: It was adequate certainly for a first aid level. And we really never got beyond that because we shipped everything serious out. I mean, they'd call in the chopper and get a chopper and ship them out. Help them out with first aid and the usual things – stop the bleeding, avoid shock…get them wrapped up and gone.

SB: Sure. When you did see the guys in critical condition come through, the first time that happened, what was that like for you?

LB: It's a good question in the sense that I…some people might say I'm a hard-ass because you do the job, I don't care what it takes. I'm not overly emotional about some of that stuff. You know, I'd been hurt when I was a kid, I cut my shoulder way open, blood all the way down, cut my eye…I'm not going to a doctor! And my mother said, too, I just said I'm not going. I should have had stitches, but no, I'm not going to do that. And that was in the days too probably the way I was raised, to a certain extent is, you live with what you got and you deal with it.

I think a thing that was harder for me sometimes is watching the black bags come in, the bodies. I remember one day, we were shuffling some stuff, and I think we had 15 of them laying there, bodies, dead soldiers. And I was walking past and I cut the corner, and I hooked one with my foot. And I'm sitting there thinking, you know, here is a whole lot of pain. There are families that are weeping, or will be weeping, there are girlfriends, there are wives, there are kids that may never know their parents. That's ugly. I mean, that's really ugly when you think about it.

If somebody's wounded, you still have hope that they're going to come out of it. Some of them, you really question it, but that's in somebody else's hands when it moves through, and hopefully they get appropriate care in the hospital, and they get appropriate help for whatever may need help. Sometimes they miss limbs. I was in a position where we could have three weeks it'd be perfectly quiet and fine, and you get relaxed, and all of a sudden kaboom! There'd be border attacks and it changes the whole scenario right now. And then it's quiet for a while again – that's the way that war was fought: hit and run, guerilla tactics. They hit you hard then they're gone, or they hit you here, there. Go down the convoy down the road, and all of a sudden you get ambushed. You can drive that road 15 times and not have a problem. And that's part of the psychological thing, you know, wears on some people's nerves. You get one or two things. Your adrenaline runs when you're really wary of everything, but you also get relaxed sometimes, you know, it's not a big deal anymore, and all of a sudden you get reality. Those types of things really made a person go through a lot of emotions…to extremes. And I've said that before already: war, at least from my experience, will test every fiber of your emotional makeup. You go from extreme hate, you go from fear, you go from anxiety, you go to happiness, to relaxation, to joy, to hate. You may bounce around like a rubber ball on some of that stuff…

SB: So did you get really close with the guys in your new unit, then?

LB: Not real close. Yeah, you're close, but when I was first assigned over there, I was with a sergeant who had been in the Second World War briefly at the end of it, with another sergeant who'd been there. Both of them had been career people. The other medic that I worked with was from Yugoslavia – he had fled when Tito[17] came to power back in '56, I think it was. Basically, he was very, very proficient in a number of languages; he could speak Spanish, German, English, parts of Russian, Italian. He picked language up fast. I mean, when you get a tonal language like the Vietnamese had, he would even tune into that. He was a pimp in LA, and I obviously got to know him. I joked a lot about some of the things – he was raised by way of a Catholic background, probably more traditional than some people are, but also very coarse, very tough. And got to know each other reasonably well, but I had only two contacts with him since I got out of the service. Because almost all the other guys that I was close to were in the other units that I left, and so I didn't have any experience like a lot of guys had where they went with the same unit and knew the same people. I was basically with strangers.

And then I worked with a doctor who…was interesting – I learned a lot of differences in medicine. Some doctors want to get out the knife and cut everybody, and another doctor wants to get out a bottle of pills and chemicals and drug everybody. The doctor that I worked with when I was over in Vietnam was a immigrant from Greece, and he was crass in his own way, in a vulgar way to me. He would talk, for example, about the Virgin Mary – "that's a bunch of crap! There's a little hanky panky going on, there's nothing to make people believe all this other stuff, you know what was going on there."

And I remember one time we were riding down the road, getting ready to go to a village to do something and he was talking, and he was scared to death of dying, I mean, he was…He'd sit there with his gun between his lap, and he was a guy that hardly knew what end the bullet came out of. But he was talking one day, he says, "You know, here you are, and here I am. I have college education, a medical degree, and if I died, that would be a real loss. Now if you die, that wouldn't be so bad." [Laughs] Ok, want me to pull my gun out and get rid of you right now, before you decide that you're going to sacrifice me? I mean, he was that way, and he was very, very self-centered, arrogant in a lot of ways.

I saw him after I got out of the service in Los Angeles – in fact, I went out there, and he was living in a big fancy house. He ended up in Beverly Hills, very wealthy. And I saw him in 1968, in fact, I can tell you the day that I saw him – it was the day that Bobby Kennedy was killed[18] because I was with Marco, the other medic with one of his girls, and we were in a bar downtown LA, having a couple drinks and talking about old times and stuff like that, then all of a sudden somebody said Bobby Kennedy was shot. It ended up going on TV and we watched that.

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[17] Josip Broz Tito was a Yugoslav communist revolutionary who served in various political roles from 1943 until his death in 1980. In 1963, he became the president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for life. He used secret police to eradicate his political opponents but is credited with keeping Yugoslavia together for many years ("Josip Broz Tito," History.com).

[18] Senator Robert Kennedy was assassinated on June 5, 1968, and died one day later at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles.

That was the last face-to-face contact I had with the doctor because we were over at his house earlier for a party, and then the last face-to-face contact I had with Marco. He was, I think, in and out of some legal issues for quite a while, and I know when I tried to check him out later, I was in Los Angeles, it must have been '79, '80, maybe later. I didn't have an address or anything, but I went through the phone book and I found what I thought was one of his relative's names, and so I called them and I just said, "I'm looking for Marco," because he said right away, "Who is this?"

And I said, "Well, I don't know where he is. Are you related to him?"

"Well, yeah, but why do you want to know?"

I said, "Well, you do this. You just tell him that Lloyd called, and here's my number."

And so I think it was a day later, I got a phone call about 11:00 at night, and he said, "Where are you at?"

I said, "I'm down at Costa Mesa area, or Fullerton."

And he said, "I come down to see you," and I said, "Well, I'm leaving at 4 in the morning, you know, I couldn't touch base with you."

"Oh, I come anyway!"

And I said, "Well, I'm going to be sleeping! But we'll get together; I'll come back up your way," I said. "Let me know where you're at and how I can have contact with you," and then he said, "Well, just use the same number you did and they should know where I'm at." And I didn't have any contact with him after that, so I don't know where he's at or what he ended up doing or what was going on. I think I talked to somebody else later on – sounded like he straightened out his life. So that was probably the closest person that I had any contact with after I got out of the service.

SB: So, were you ever part of a convoy that got ambushed? Did you ever see any "action" when you were in Vietnam?

LB: Not directly in front of me. I mean, there was, but not in a vehicle that I was in or in my immediate group.

SB: So then, seeing that happen ahead of you, were you someone that would move forward to assist the wounded, or did you have to hang back?

LB: Well, first of all, everybody kind of hankered down to sure it's not coming from another direction, you know. And obviously, you can go ahead, but this is the thing that you always got to be careful with. It's like a magnet; pull everybody there and then shoot them. You know, you got to watch out for the perimeters so everybody's watching, and obviously the people that are closest are going to try to take action to protect people that are involved. Problem is, a lot of times also, it was a bomb, you know, roadside things. And what they did is they'd set them in the ditch and they'd fire up the explosive into the truck or into the group that's going through, and you don't know if you run out there, whether you're going to trip some more of those

types of things. So it really puts you in a precarious position, and you try to help but not be reckless. And that sometimes is a hard dividing line to figure out…

And don't get me wrong, there were a lot of guys that saw a lot worse stuff than I did on a regular basis because there were moments in time where it was really bad, and there were moments in time where it was very good. For example, I was in there for about - well, let's see once, I get out April I guess – I was on a short term because it was at the time that they were building up. I think when I went over there, there was 85,000 troops; when I left, there was something like 275-300,000. And so they sent some of us over there that had more than 90 days because they were trying to build up the troops as fast as they could.

And I left the field – and it was always the idea, when I say left the field, where I was with my base camp, and I went to Saigon, and it was in Camp L - what they called Camp L was the Saigon airport, where it was a repple depple – people coming in, people going out. I was there for I think two days, three days, waiting for a "flight manifest"[19] to get on a plane to fly back to the States. I was scheduled to leave at 2:00 in the morning, and at about 11:30 that night, we got hammered hard with mortars[20]. I think 160 guys were injured, I think 10, 12 of them were killed. And they're just like shooting fish in a bowl – I mean, we had no protection, and that was very, very frustrating.

When I was in the service out in the field, one of the standing orders was, the first thing you pick up in the morning is your gun, the last thing you lay down at night is your gun. You carry it with you everywhere you go, whatever you do. And they took it away when we ran into Camp L, though, because this was supposed to be a safe repple depple, and I mean, the first thing you're doing is reaching for your gun, especially when the shells start coming in. And of course the plane didn't leave that night because everything was chaos, so I got on another flight manifest the next day, I think it was, and flew out from Saigon to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, then Clark Air Force Base to Tokyo, and then Tokyo to Travis Air Force Base in California. And then I was basically released. I mean, I went through and got out. They didn't have all these things, all the readjusting and psychological training and all that stuff, I mean, that wasn't there. You're out in the street, free person from 48 hours earlier sitting under a bunch of crap. [Cell phone rings] Just a second…So, I went back.

If I ever had a moment in time that I would live over, I would live over the time from Tokyo to the US. I was awake that whole trip, and I thought, Lloyd, what are you going to do? This is the first day of the rest of your life…

Screwed around, had a lot of fun when I was in California. I mean, it was party time, and it was a freedom that I enjoyed, and I was experiencing life in a whole different dimension. When I moved over there to California and I start working in a machine shop, I got acquainted with a guy named Carol Roberts who was originally from Des Moines, who was probably 34, 35 years old at the time; I'm a 19-year-old kid. He was going through a divorce, never heard about any of that stuff in Iowa. He had been in the service, and he was a heavy-duty drinker. And I say drinker, I

[19] A list of passengers and crew of an aircraft compiled before the departure.
[20] A short, portable gun for firing explosive shells called mortar bombs at high angles.

mean, he was an alcoholic. Two of the other guys that I worked with were alcoholics – one was an extensive alcoholic, the other one was a weekend alcoholic.

And the other guy that I got close to was a guy named Howard who came from Utah, originally was a Mormon, who had one time been a chauffeur for Harry Truman,[21] and then when he got out, he was a professional boxer for a while, and then ended up buying a bar. And he said, you do that in Utah, that's a bad deal. And if you get divorced in Utah, he said, they take everything including the blood out of your veins. So then he went to Las Vegas and he worked there for a period of time, and then he ended up going to LA, and he was working for a business called Axelson Steel, and he was a production control manager there and then ended up booking on the side – and they say booking horse races and stuff like that. He had – how should I say this – a lot of experience in the world [laughs], which I heard stories and stories and was fascinated by that.

Carol, on the other hand, was also a lot that way, was very successful in running the business, I mean, he had a brand new Cadillac and a brand new boat, and I could use it when I wanted to and go out to Long Beach and go to Catalina. But he was a guy that was going through a lot of personal chaos, and I used to spend all kinds of time with him in the evenings. His favorite line was, "Get a six-pack of 12- or 16-ounce Olympia beer and we'll sit and talk. And I want to know about your life, and I want to know about your world, and I want to know why you think this way." And he was a guy that probably reaffirmed who I was as a person, more than anybody else did.

When I got out of high school, I coined Martin Luther King's[22] phrase before he did – thank God I'm free at last! Free at last [laughs]! I hated school, high school. I liked the social part of it, didn't like the studying, didn't like the work, didn't like doing any of that stuff. So when I went out there, he would talk, and he said – he called me Whitey – "Whitey, you got so many gifts. You ought to be in school, you ought to be learning." I said, "No, I don't want any part of that," and he just kept telling me, you can do things. He was kind of like a second father to me.

Well, what happened is, he ended up committing suicide when I was in Vietnam, and that hit me like a ton of bricks. And it was a night after we'd been shelled, and I'm sitting there thinking, he can't stand to live where I want to go back to. Life does not make any sense. I really struggled with that, because I knew he – and we talked about everything, we talked about religion, we talked about background training, we talked about values, and it was just really – that all came to mind on my trip from Tokyo back to the States. And I really didn't know where I was going to go or what direction I was going to go; I think I had one thing in my mind…

I had always known religion; I went through the rituals and the traditions and stuff like that. But I really, really struggled with the fact that is there a God? Is this really real? And I think I'm going to commit my life to finding an answer to that question, if I do nothing else. I'm not going to say, ok, I want to do this or that, other than that one goal. I'm going to find out whether that really is what life is about. Is there

[21] Harry S. Truman was the 33rd President of the United States, known for dropping the atomic bomb on Japan, ending World War II.

[22] Martin Luther King, Jr. was a social activist and Baptist minister who played a key role in the American civil rights movement in the 1950s until his assassination in 1968 (History.com).

a God? On hindsight, very arrogant statement, because I was thinking *I* could decide to figure out if there was a God. On the flip side of the coin, but I did learn about it, I think I very much came to the reality that, when you search God, he will bless you. And it's beyond comprehension in that respect.

So what I did is, when I landed in San Jose, I had a girlfriend that I had been communicating with in that area. I spent about 5 days, 6 days there, I think, and then I headed back this way, was here for 4 days, I think. And my plan was to go to Santa Barbara, California, because I had a good friend there. But I also had a brother who was in Michigan, who was a year and a half younger than I was, and he had gone to Dordt for a year and a half and then was kicked out and moved to Ogden, Utah, lived there – in fact, I visited him one Fourth of July when I was in California – first plane ride I had, I flew out there to see him. And he was going to get married in June, so he wanted me to stand up at his wedding, and I kind of debated that. I wanted to go back to California.

Well, when I was here four days, I had a chance to catch a ride to Michigan. My mother couldn't figure out why I couldn't stay around home, and I was terribly restless; I just wanted to go, go, go. So I went to Michigan and met him, and I had a sister there – my younger brother and sister are twins, a year and a half below me, and they were both in Grand Rapids at the time. And so my brother kept saying to me, "Why don't you get a job? Why don't you hang around here for the summer?" And I said, "Well, I debate that." But I did; I went to Keeler Brass and I applied for a job on Friday, and they hired me right away, and Monday I went there, and I stood in a line and I watched the people walk in. Nobody smiled, they punched a time clock, the machine started, it was clang, bang, bang, bang. And it just about drove me nuts, and I was there for two days, and I walked out – couldn't handle it. I was used to listening to the crickets at night – the machine, whether it was a 30-caliber, 50-caliber, ingoing, outgoing, all that stuff, and all of a sudden it was just *kshhh*!

And I went to my brother and I said, "You're going to have to find somebody else to stand up, I'm heading to California."

He said, "What could you do?"

I said, "Well, I got to be outside," and he said, "Why don't you try construction work again?"

I said, "Well, I could probably do that."

I called a guy up, saw an ad in the paper, and he said, "Yeah, I'm starting a job in Rockford, Michigan, tomorrow."

I said, "Well, how far is that?" It's 25 miles from where I was at. I said, that's too far to drive. Called the next guy up – my brother saying, "Call another one, try another one!" So I called another one, called the guy up, and he said, "Yeah, I'm starting a house tomorrow, it's about a mile and a half from where you're at." I told him where I was at in Michigan. So I thought, well, I'm not in a big hurry, and I want to sort things out, don't know where I'm going, what I'm doing, so I did start working there. Got along with the guys good and went to my brother's wedding in Wisconsin, came back, and in the meantime, I got to meet one of his good friends, and this guy was from California, originally recently, so we had something in common. And his dad was the head hydraulic engineer, I believe, for Bendix

Corporation or whatever – he worked on atomic submarines. And his parents were divorced and his father ended up marrying his secretary and had a baby with him, but anyway, Don got into a lot of trouble. I mean, he was in jail when he was 13 years old – stole a car, went across a military reservation, ended up in the days when you got thrown in jail whether you were a juvie or whatever. Got popped by some guy there.

Then he and another kid who was an orphan took off, and they traveled around the country in an old car, just looking for themselves, and one of the other guys that he was with, John De Jong, they went down through Texas and Florida, and then they ended up on the East Coast and then John went to a revival meeting and was converted. Don would go to the bar on Sunday and drink, and John went to church [laughs]. But anyway, they got to Michigan, and then John decided to go to school at Reformed Bible College, and Don said, well I'm riding back to California, and got to Lake Michigan, couldn't go any further, went back and decided to go to RBC at that time, Reformed Bible College, and struggling with a lot of religious issues.

And I met him, and then we had long talks. And he said, "Lloyd, you ought to go to Reformed Bible College, that'd be good for you." I said, "Not my thing, man. I don't need to go to that." What I did is ended up going there, registered at the last minute in the fall and went to school there for a year. And as a result of that, met my wife through a whole other set of circumstances…

Had a prof that put a lot of pressure on me to work in a church, and I said, that's not my thing. Another one wanted me to work at Muskegon on the harbor there, doing mission stuff, and I said, that's not my thing. I said, I came here for one reason. I wanted to figure out whether God existed or whether I knew God. I said, I did not come here to be a preacher, I did not come here to be [laughs] full-time evangelist or anything of that nature. Well, the upshot of the whole thing is that I ended up in Battle Creek doing that, working with the church as a counselor because of the tremendous amount of pressure they put on me. And it was the dean of the school who got me in a corner – met me in the hall one day – and said, "Where are you going this summer?"

I said, "I'm going back to California; I've got a job lined up, and I'm going there and moving there."

He said, "No, you're going to Battle Creek."

I said, "No, I'm not going to Battle Creek."

"Do you know what Farel said to Calvin when he was going to leave Geneva?[23] You shirk your duty, and may God condemn your soul to hell." I mean, that's really what the upshot of it was, and I said, crap [laughs]. This puts me in a miserable bind. But out of that, I ended up meeting my wife, and got two wonderful kids, a kid who travels more than I did…Then I ended up going to Calvin for four years, and then I ended up going to law school and went into law business in Saginaw, Michigan, for three years, then moved back here. Been here since.

[23] Christian reformer John Calvin was fleeing to Strasbourg for academic study in 1536. He stopped in Geneva, Switzerland, on the way, and William Farel, a reformer from Geneva, begged Calvin to stay. When Calvin resisted, Farel cursed him, so Calvin remained in Geneva to reform the church (Mathis).

SB: So, would you say your experiences in Vietnam, was that part of your experiences right when you got back? Did you feel like whatever actions you took were somehow influenced by what you had experienced over there?

LB: Oh, very definitely. I think there was a number of things that affected me, and I remember one time when I was by my brother, I think, it was about a week after I was there. He had an alarm clock, and that thing went off in the morning, and I took my fist without even thinking and hit it and knocked it across the room, just smashed it. And it was just a foreign sound, so you reacted that way, I mean, whenever you heard something like that. In that sense, there were a lot of things that you were on edge about.

On the flip side of the coin is, what has value? What's worth pursuing? What's worth doing? There are a lot of people that didn't make it back. How do I pay respect to them? You know, I mean, what about my citizenship responsibilities that they obviously can't fulfill? I went through a whole range of questions about that, and how do you help people? How do you understand people? So that was kind of the whole process. So yeah, it affected my world, it affected my life.

Do I begrudge the experience? No way. I've said this before, and I say it again, when I was raised on a farm, experienced scarcity, later experienced abundance. When I moved to California, I lived there for four years in different environments. We lived in the inner city, I lived in the ghetto. In Michigan – I went through a bunch of crap there. Those experiences, when I compare living in California, drifting around the way I did, to college education, that's worth every bit of a college education if not a whole lot more because if your eyes are open and you run into relationships with people I worked - and when I worked in the construction crew, I worked with Hispanics and blacks, and I ended up being a laborer foreman because of the fact that the guy that I'm working with wanted me to follow them around. We were having all kinds of union problems at that time, and I would end up with the job steward from LA local, Felix, who was a Hispanic, at that time. The other local had a black job steward, and I was caught in the middle of those guys quite often. And I say caught in the middle – they'd come to me and say, they're not doing their job, and it was a triangle, the white people griping about the blacks and the Hispanics, and the blacks and the Hispanics were griping about this group and that kind of experience is immeasurable. And I appreciate it very much.

So did it affect us? Sure. How'd I raise my kids? My son's best friends, I think, when he was young here in Sioux Center were people from Cambodia. Where does he live today? He lives in Nepal. He's always had a huge passion for poor. Did we pass on those values? I think so. Were we responsible for his decision, no, I think he did that on his own, but I mean certainly we laid some seeds there. You know, that's part of the whole experience.

SB: Have you ever gone back to Vietnam?

LB: No.

SB: Would you want to?

LB: I think I would. Obviously if I did, I'd like to go to the areas where we were at, see once what happened to those areas. My son and his wife were living in Bangladesh, and when we went over to visit them in Bangladesh, their very good friend was a native Bangla guy, and his wife was from Vietnam, and from Saigon. And then the Chinese area where there's this certain Chinese sector of Vietnam, so we got to talking about that, and she said, oh, they heard stories about that because of where things were at and so forth, and then I told her where I had been up there, and she knew generally where that area was, and she says, "You come, I show you Vietnam." She wanted to try to encourage us to go back there. So, yeah, it's open question.

SB: Have you ever been to the Memorial in D.C.?

LB: The Memorial in D.C.?

SB: Yeah, the Vietnam one?

LB: Yes.

SB: What were your emotions and reactions to that?

LB: You can't help but think about a lot of wasted lives. When I went to school too that was another thing I struggled with. I was very disappointed in a lot of the ways we as Americans acted in Vietnam. Example, going down the road and watching an American throw a grenade at a water buffalo out in the field. Now water buffalo is essential to the people. The second thing is, we had this whole – how should I say it? – mindset, and I'd heard a lot of this crap early on already, and I say crap – communism was going to take over the world. You know, if we let Vietnam go, it would be this John Foster Douglas' Domino Theory,[24] it's going to be one after the other, boom boom boom, and they're going to take over everything. And Vietnam is rich in minerals and resources, and we have to make sure…

When I got out in the field there and worked with those Vietnamese, I mean, they didn't know the difference between a democracy and communism. All they wanted was to farm in their little fields in their little place and be left alone. And here we're turning everything on them between powers that are fighting and putting them in the middle of something, which is crappy for them! I mean, these people are trying to survive – in the day, I got to be friendly to the Americans; at night, I got to be…And they were abused in every sense. They were shot – My Lai[25] doesn't

[24] Bierma is talking about John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State from 1953 to 1959 who was very opposed to communism and advocated the Domino Theory, the belief that communism would spread from one country to the next until it dominated the world. This idea shaped US foreign policy during the Cold War (Llewellyn et al.).

[25] A company of US soldiers brutally killed over 500 women, children, and old men in the village of My Lai in 1968. The US Army covered up the massacre for a year, fueling anti-war sentiment and dividing the United States over the Vietnam War (History.com).

surprise me at all. There were instances where we shot at stuff that I just thought, this is just plain stupid.

But when you're in the middle of it, you don't have time to sit there and say, ok, now I'm going to contemplate that for a while, while somebody shoots me. You shoot back, you kill back. And I was antiwar when I got back. I just thought, if this is the way we fight battles, we have no business being over there. Now patriotism is good. Blind patriotism is not. And so I really struggled with that.

SB: So did you ever participate in any antiwar demonstrations?

LB: Yes, a couple of them.

SB: Where were those at, do you remember?

LB: In Michigan, yeah. And antiwar in a sense that I didn't like the extreme antiwar[26] people, you know. I had a lot of conflicts in this sense. When people ran to Canada,[27] I didn't like that either. I didn't like that kind of action that would say run from your duty or your responsibility. I felt it more important to, you know, if they want to call me into the service, I'll go into it, but I think I changed my views about whether I'm going to blindly say this is fine. In other words, when a commanding officer tells me to do something – that was an experience too in Vietnam, I think really stuck with me. When I went over to Vietnam, we had a commanding officer - I wouldn't have followed him across the street. Later on we had a Special Forces officer – I would have followed him anywhere. I trusted the guy, I knew what he was…To me, it demonstrated a big difference in leadership, a big difference in the way you handled yourself. Did those things carry over? Absolutely. Why do some people follow some people and some people think they're leaders and nobody's following? You look at a lot of that stuff, so those were good learning experiences.

Yeah, as far as the war was concerned, I mean, I don't think I ever felt at any time that we should have accolades or praise or anything like that for doing what we did. It was a duty, and you do your duty and that's it. And I guess I wasn't programmed to tell people, now you should really treat me special because I'm a vet or anything like that – my mind just doesn't function that way. I mean, I don't think in that regard. Is it nice to receive? I think there's more comments today than there certainly were after we got out of the Vietnam War. You know, the people will say thank you for serving and so forth, yeah. I did my duty, I mean, that was what I was called to do at that time. And so I can't really say that I was looking for anything. Still don't.

SB: So do you participate in any veteran's organizations now?

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[26] Antiwar activists turned to violence in the late 1960s, fighting the police, forcing colleges to cancel class, blocking roads, and burning buildings ("The Antiwar").

[27] An estimated 20,000 to 30,000 draft-eligible American men fled to Canada as immigrants during the Vietnam War. Many deserters also went to Canada ("Canada and the Vietnam War").

LB: No, I do not. I shouldn't say participate, I guess that's a good question. When you say, I'm not an active member of American Legion, I'm not an active member of the Vets. I did go to the Sunday memorial service for veterans – in fact, I spoke already at the Memorial Day services. In fact, I think I did it a couple times. I participated in most marches and so forth because I do, I respect the vets. But I also retain the right to have different political views on some of these issues. And I say this: when I went over there and served in the service, the best phrase that I know how to explain it is, I did it for the weak and the meek, the ignorant and the unaware, and the poor and the meek. That's the composition of our society. If you want to reverse it, you can say it for the weak and the meek, the poor, ignorant and unaware – there's a lot of those. And so you do it for them. That doesn't mean they all have to think the same way you do, that doesn't mean you all have to be of the same mold, same mindset. That's probably my balance [laughs].

SB: Sure. In terms of popular culture, are there songs that kind of make you remember certain things about Vietnam? Have you watched any films about it? Or do you like to stay away from those kinds of things?

LB: I pretty much stay away from it. If I look at it on hindsight, if I had to do it over again, I would have gone in the Special Forces for a variety of reasons. Number one is, I don't think that the mindset really adapted to guerrilla warfare, and I did quite a bit of study in guerrilla warfare – it's hit and run, attack, and so forth. The Special Forces, I think, were trained to live with the people, not away from the people. They were highly skilled, and I had involvement with them when I was in Alaska, had involvement with them when I was in Vietnam. And I appreciated that they were trained.

Not saying that the regular Army was all bad – it was the idea so much that the structure of fighting the way we used to fight is what we should do today. So I agree very much with the Navy SEALs being used for surgical operations, if you want to call it that, Special Forces, specially trained groups. An example: in our compound in Vietnam, there was a little town close to us. At night, we all retreated to our base, we were inside the base. Town people were out there – they were very vulnerable to the VC and to anybody else that was around. And so, do we help them by doing that? No, I mean, you protect yourself. Special Forces lived in and among them in the villages or wherever they were trained, and that to me is a much better way to deal with them, because a lot of this stuff was political. And I say political underneath – how do we change people's minds? Well, you show them you care about them – you care about their safety, you care about their families, you care about their food, you care about their security. And we didn't demonstrate that with the regular Army, and so why would they believe in us? Why would they think that they should help us? They were survivors – helped the VC at night and helped the Americans during the day. And that just doesn't make sense. It's not a realistic approach to resolving a international problem.

SB: So, just kind of some concluding questions then for you. Have you ever talked about your experiences in Vietnam to anyone before?

LB: Depends how much I had to drink [laughs]. That's share experience: oh, where were you at? Oh, what was it like? What were you doing up there? And so you share those kinds of stories.

SB: Was your wife interested?

LB: In Vietnam?

SB: In your experiences in Vietnam, yeah.

LB: Yes, to a certain extent. I think it's harder for her to comprehend that – I mean, my wife is a compassionate, do-gooder person, has a hard time understanding violence. I've watched *Platoon*[28] once because somebody told me, you really ought to see that, and it brings back memories, and these are things that I didn't like about it that stick with you.

When I started school, I had a very hard time describing anything without using four-letter words. I mean, that was my vocabulary. And when I listened to *Platoon*, the trash talking, the crass talking, stuff like that – man, oh man, that could fit right back into my vocabulary right now. And I don't want to reinforce that, I don't want to use that again. And I can slip into it very easily if I get angry, you know, blankity blank blank blank blank. I mean, it comes out just *whoosh*! Just like that. In that sense, my wife is very much opposed to violence, opposed to a lot of that stuff. You know, I think she realizes it's been part of my life and my world, there's no question about that. Hopefully you don't fall back into some of the bad stuff, so that's the way it is.

SB: So has it placed any tension on your personal life, moving forward, or were you able to detach from it?

LB: I think I could detach in part. I suspect the military probably had more of an effect – you know, the overall types of things in the military. You get little quips and quotes all times like, my wife had to do something the other day, and we were talking about that – I said, it's front and center, immediately if not sooner. That's military jargon [laughs]. Just some of the quips you pick up when you're in there, about to get this done immediately, pronto, don't waste time. And she is a person that doesn't waste any time, she's very, very efficient and very good. But she'd probably say, yeah, there are things that show up in his world and his life that I might not say would be there if it wouldn't be for some of his past experiences. Yeah, I don't know how to answer that question. She'd have to answer that.

Nightmares – I don't think I have nightmares per se. Obviously, there are things that I do wake up sometimes, middle of the night thinking about something, sweating. And it may be tangentially related to that…Like I said, when you have

[28] A movie from 1986 by former Vietnam solider turned director Oliver Stone, *Platoon* approaches the war critically, showing its brutality and violence (Sullivan).

emotions that go from fear to anxiety to joy to sorrow to that whole gamut, they do have an emotional side effect in your world, in your life.

What really still hits me hard, and I have a hard time emotionally controlling it yet, is when I think about Carol Roberts, the guy that I was with. I mean, he was…I just struggled with the fact that he had such a difficulty with life. I mean life in the sense of a heavy boozer. When I went to work with him, he'd come in at 10:00 and he'd be there until about 11. "Hey Whitey, run down and go to Harry and get me a six-pack of beer." And that was his lunch. And then about 2:30 in the afternoon, "Hey, run and get me another six-pack of beer!" And by the time it was 4:30, 5:00, he was half-sozzled, and that was an interesting world to me. And Harry was a Jewish guy that had a little 7/11 type store down the street, and it had bars in front of it, it had graffiti on the doors.

Even little incidental things that I think about now – he blew his head off with a shotgun. I used that shotgun when I was working late shift with another guy, and it was 9:30, 10:00, and two kids came in. And we were in kind of a fenced-in compound in Compton on Alameda Street. And it was a tough area, but these two white guys came running into the shop, bleeding. One of them had been hit with a tire iron, and they had a carload of blacks after them. And they were just desperate – they were Navy guys – "Please take us to the boat in Long Beach! We'll pay you, we'll do anything if you'd help us, these guys are after us."

And I said, "What's the problem?"

"Well, the car across the street, they're there, there's six of them in there."

I said, "Don't worry about it." I walked into the office – we had a shotgun in the office, I pulled it out, slammed in three shells, walked back out with the gun, pointed it across the street like that, and those guys *werrrr*! And they pull ahead, I said, "Get in my car." So I take the shotgun, get in the car with them, and we drive down to Harbor Freeway. I said, "I'll tell you what, I'll drop you guys off here, you have to hitchhike or make your own way back."

So I drove back to the shop, I walked up, I drove into the compound area there, and here comes that car rolling around. Stops across the street, I get out, drop the shotgun like that, and these guys were gone right now. I walked into the office, pulled out the shells, put them away, went back to work. Didn't think anything of it. I mean, or anything other extraordinary. And that's the gun he used to kill himself, so he had that around the office probably for that kind of protection. You know, you look at that kind of stuff…it was part of the world at that time. Like I said, I was living like a millionaire kid – he had a boat, a new Cadillac, I used it whenever I wanted to. That was another dimension of that relationship.

SB: Did you have any kind of closing thoughts about your experiences in Vietnam, or anything else that you wanted to mention?

LB: I would say this: I'm a person that likes variety, I don't have a tendency to get locked in on one particular thing, too tight. I've been very blessed with a wide variety of experiences, and I say wide variety of experiences from, like I said earlier, being raised on a farm, scarcity, experience abundance, from doing farm labor to worth ethics that were learned to obeying higher authorities to seeing life

from a totally different dimension moving to California, not knowing anybody and being exposed to people that were good people but a whole different set of life expectancies. I mean, from Howard as a Mormon to Carol as a nonbeliever, always struggling, trying to figure out religion is all about, to losing him, to experiencing war in its many dimensions, to living in the inner city ghetto, which we did for two years, and we had our house broken into, you know, I mean, all the hostility and hate of the 60s and the 70s, to ending up being a construction worker that was supposed to be going nowhere, to ending up sitting behind this desk here in a law office [laughs].

To make me laugh and say, I have been very blessed; the Lord has really answered promises that I never expected. And putting up with somebody that was very arrogant and egotistic thinking that I could find out if he was there – he told me, he was the one that decided that I should know him and pursue him in a sense of feeding my inquisitive mind about those issues. So I've been blessed, thankfully. And don't get me wrong, I'm very humbled by watching a veteran that has lost limbs or legs, or mentally going through a lot of shock and so forth, and I have nephews that were in Iraq. I see some of those issues, and thankful that I survived the way I did, not because I was so good, it was just I was blessed.

And physically, I've been able to do a lot of things that I – that's another dimension of life – I still play basketball yet, periodically, and enjoy physical activity, climb mountains. My brother lives in Colorado, climbed Longs Peak, Blanca, Pike's Peak. That's been a blessing, too…

Life has many experiences. Traveling in a car when I was a kid, always 100 miles an hour [laughs]. Tickets, yeah, I got a lot of them. Enjoy life? Yes. Enjoy people? Love people. And I agree very much with Gerry Spence[29] – he said one of the biggest problems you have is what you have to be able to do and define as a lawyer is, number one, do you love people? And I say love people not in the sense that you agree with them politically or anything like that, but just that human dimension of figuring out where they think and how they do and where they're at. And that's just an exciting part of life, especially in this practice, from divorces to family feuds to business relationships. And all that, I think, plays into what my background was. I can talk to military people and have an understanding, ex-military people – my nephew came to me when got back from Iraq, he did three tours there. And he said too, you talk to some of the guys, and you talk to people, but they don't understand the way you understand. And I don't know if I understand because you can't live through every experience or know every experience, but you do keep your sensitivity level up, so…So, that's part of my story.

SB: Well, thank you for sharing with me. I really appreciate it. Quite a life [laughs].

LB: Yeah, like I said, my son, when he was a senior in high school, said to me, "Dad?" And he didn't like school either, goofed off a lot, did a lot of other stuff. "Do I have to go to college?"

[29] Gerry Spence is a trial lawyer who has tried and won many nationally known cases and has spent his life fighting for the poor, injured, and the forgotten. He has never lost a criminal case as a prosecutor or as a defense attorney and has not lost a civil case since 1969 (*Gerry Spence*).

I said, “Troy, your head’s not in it, don’t do it. You’re not ready for it.”

“Really?”

I said, “Yeah, I mean it.” That was in March. He went up and told my wife, and my wife said, “What did you say?”

“He wants to know if he should go to college; he’s not ready for it.”

She said, “Well, I don’t like it, but I got to agree.”

So he went to work, construction crew for a summer, had a great time, caroused on the weekends, and then fall came, a bunch of his friends went off to college, wasn’t as much fun, got into the winter – cold, wasn’t any fun at all. Next spring, he came to me and said, “Dad, I think I can get a job in Holland, Europe – greenhouse. What do you think of that?” I said, “Opportunity of a lifetime, grab it.”

So he did, he moved to Europe and he went to work in a greenhouse, and he worked there for 9 months, 10 months. But while he was there, traveled through England, France, Scotland, Switzerland, and backpacking, going up to England, Scotland. He went there and just met guys and stayed in youth hostels and so forth. Came home and was home here for about three months, worked at a golf course at Okoboji, and then moved to Australia and worked in Western Australia and ended up running into a kid there that was from Denmark. They became bosom buddies and they bought an old car and spent a month on the West Coast learning how to surf, diving. And then he took off, we didn’t know for sure where he was at for a while - we didn’t have bad relations or anything – I never paid for anything of his. I have a rule about that, I’m pretty sticky. You know, kids got to learn to earn their own way. Well, he did. I mean, he got out of high school, and he didn’t even talk to me about money ever other than you got to take care of yourself. Well, he had done that, but he had sent money home, and he was using his credit card, and then they stopped him because he hadn’t made a payment on it. And he called up, and I said, “Where in the heck are you at?”

And he said, “Well, I’m in Sydney, I’m heading to Melbourne tomorrow.”

I said, “Well, at least let us know when you make a general move, so we know where you’re at.”

“Ok, Dad.” Well, then he called and he was up in the Barrier Reef 1500 miles north, ran into a bunch of Danish kids, went diving with them. He spent about three and a half weeks there, four weeks there. And then he called, he was back in Sydney. And then he called and he was in New Zealand with some other guys, running around there. And then he came back.

“What do you do now?”

“Well, I’m going to go to Brazil.”

“Why Brazil?”

“I met somebody there.” So he was home for a little while, and all of a sudden he started reading, and he was at Okoboji working the golf course there, and start reading and reading and reading.

One day I said, “When are you leaving?”

He said, “Well, Dad, I think I’m going to go to Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids.”

I said, “Why’s that?”

He said, "When I was on the road, I ran into the Hindus, Muslims, atheists, agnostics, druggies, alcoholics, you name it, in the youth hostels." And he said, "I got to thinking, nobody knew where they were going. Very few Americans, a lot of Asians, South Africans, Europeans, Scandinavians. They're just all drifting, and we get into these discussions about what life is and what it isn't, and I thought, you know, I *think* there is a God, and I think that maybe I do believe something, but I don't know how to articulate it. So I'm going to go to school and find out."

So he went to RBC for a year, and at the end of the year, he hitchhiked to the West Coast, got on a boat, went up to Alaska, and went to work up there and then decided to come back, went back to RBC for another year, and then the next year he took a vehicle down with a couple other guys from Pennsylvania and down through Mexico into Belize, drove four of them down there into Central America. And then ended up coming back and when he was going to graduate from school, then he was debating about going into law or going to seminary. Struggled with it quite a bit and ended up going to seminary, and went the first year, and went to Florida and had a church there for the summer, no associate pastor. He said, if I'm going to go into this, I may jump in both feet first.

Came back, another year, and then he moved to Philippines, spent a year in the Philippines, and then he went from there to India. Ran and did some traveling in India and then went to Nepal, where he had a good friend of his, and then back, and then to the Philippines and had surgery, and then came back here. And he's been in South Africa – he eventually went through seminary and then ended up moving to Bangladesh with his wife, spent three years there, and now he's living in Nepal, teaching in a seminary. So, he wandered too [laugh]!

SB: Runs in the family, then, I guess [laughs]. Quite the world traveler, goodness.

LB: But all those are blessings, too…When we lived in Michigan, we were moving to Iowa, and one of my friends said, you're going to raise your kids in Iowa, they won't be exposed to anything. I laughed. He's been exposed to more stuff than anybody.

SB: Definitely. Well, thank you Lloyd – really appreciate it!

LB: Yep.

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